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(54) Structure for temperature compensating the inverse saturation current of bipolar transistors.

(57) To compensate for the reduction in emitter current (I_E) caused by the inverse saturation current (I_{CS}) becoming significant at high temperature, a bipolar transistor (2, 3), having collector, base and emitter regions defining a base-emitter junction, is provided with a diode (11, 12) parallel connected in inverse configuration, to the base-emitter junction of the transistor (2, 3), and having substantially the same saturation current (I_S). The diode is produced by mutually short-circuiting the emitter and base of a further bipolar transistor (11, 12) identical to the compensated transistor (2, 3) and having its collector and emitter connected respectively to the base and emitter of the compensated transistor.

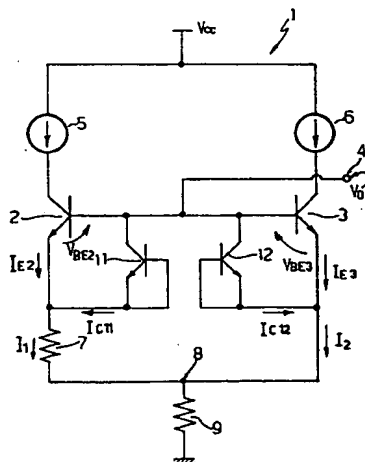


Fig. 2

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The present invention relates to a structure for temperature compensating the inverse saturation current of bipolar transistors.

The emitter current I_E of bipolar transistors (according to Ebers Moll equations; see, for example, P.R.Gray, R.G.Mayer, Analysis and Design of Analog Integrated Circuits, John Wiley & Sons, 1977, page 22) is the sum of two terms, one due to the voltage (V_{BE}) applied to the base-emitter junction of the transistor, and the other to the inverse saturation current:

$$I_E = I_{ES}[\exp(V_{BE}/V_T)-1] + \alpha_R I_{CS}[\exp(V_{BC}/V_T)-1] \quad (1)$$

wherein the current entering the transistor is considered positive.

The second term in the above equation is normally negligible as compared with the first, but, in the case of high temperatures and large area transistors, may become comparable with the first, in which case, it is no longer negligible. In fact (bearing in mind that $\alpha_R I_{CS} = I_S$), this gives:

$$I_S(T) = I_{Snom} \cdot \left[\frac{T}{T_{nom}} \right]^3 \cdot \exp \left[- \frac{E_g}{K} \left(\frac{1}{T} - \frac{1}{T_{nom}} \right) \right] \quad (2)$$

(I.E.Getreu, Modeling the Bipolar Transistor, Elsevier, page 21), where T is the temperature considered, T_{nom} the nominal temperature (both in °K), and E_g the energy gap of the semiconductor material (in eV); and

$$I_{Snom} = \frac{qAD_n n_i^2}{Q_B} \quad (3)$$

(page 13 of the above text by P.R.Gray, R.G.Mayer), where A is the emitter area of the transistor, D_n the electron diffusion constant, n_i the concentration of intrinsic carriers in the semiconductor, and Q_B the number of doping atoms in the base per area unit of the emitter.

According to equations (2) and (3), therefore, the inverse saturation current I_{CS} increases alongside an increase in temperature (doubles roughly every 10°C), and also depends on the area of the transistor. Consequently, when the temperature of the semiconductor wafer portion integrating the transistor exceeds a given temperature (around 150-160°C), the second term comes into effect, i.e. causes a reduction in the emitter current.

The reduction in emitter current caused by the second term in (1) may prove troublesome in certain applications, as, for example, in the case of a voltage reference or so-called "band-gap" circuit, a typical configuration of which is shown in Fig.1. The known circuit, numbered 1, in Fig.1 comprises two NPN transistors 2 and 3 having a definite area ratio (in this case, the emitter area of transistor 2 is ten times that of transistor 3); having their bases connected to each other and defining the output terminal 4 of the circuit; their collectors connected to supply V_{CC} (first reference potential line) via respective current sources 5, 6; and their emitters connected together and to ground (second reference potential line). In more detail, the emitter terminal of transistor 2 is connected to the emitter terminal of transistor 3 via a resistor 7, and the common point 8 is grounded via a further resistor 9.

In the circuit shown, the output voltage V_o equals the base-emitter voltage drop V_{BE1} of transistor 3 plus the voltage drop of resistor 9. That is, if DV_{BE} is the voltage drop of resistor 7 (the difference between the base-emitter voltages of transistors 3 and 2); R_7 the resistance of resistor 7; R_9 the resistance of resistor 9; and assuming sources 5 and 6 supply the same current; this gives:

$$V_o = V_{BE3} + R_9(I_{E2} + I_{E3}) = V_{BE3} + 2DV_{BE}(R_9/R_7) \quad (4)$$

where

$$V_{BE3} = V_T \ln(I_{E3}/I_{S3}) \quad (5)$$

$$DV_{BE} = V_T \ln (I_{E3}/I_{E2}) (I_{S2}/I_{S3}) \quad (6)$$

and $V_T = KT/q$.

As long as the second term in (1) is negligible, (I_{E3}/I_{E2}) remains substantially constant (these currents being set by sources 5 and 6 under normal operating conditions); (I_{S2}/I_{S3}) equals the area ratio of the two transistors and is therefore also constant; and difference DV_{BE} varies oppositely to V_{BE3} , thus maintaining a constant output voltage V_o .

Under high temperature conditions, however, ratio (I_{E3}/I_{E2}) no longer remains constant, due to a differing variation in the voltage drops at the base-emitter junctions of transistors 2 and 3. That is, due to the larger area of transistor 2 as compared with 3, the second term in (1) first affects, or at any rate is greater in, transistor 2, so that difference DV_{BE} no longer varies oppositely to V_{BE3} , thus varying the output voltage V_o of the circuit, which is no longer capable of supplying an accurate reference voltage at high temperature.

It is an object of the present invention to provide a structure designed to compensate inverse saturation current even at temperatures at which said inverse current becomes comparable with the first term in (1). According to the present invention, there is provided a structure for temperature compensating the inverse saturation current of bipolar transistors, as claimed in Claim 1.

A preferred, non-limiting embodiment of the present invention will be described by way of example with reference to the accompanying drawings, in which:

Fig.1 shows an electric diagram of a known band-gap circuit;

Fig.2 shows an electric diagram of the compensating structure according to the present invention, as applied to the Fig.1 circuit.

The Fig.2 band-gap circuit is identical to that already described in connection with Fig.1, and is therefore illustrated using the same numbering system.

According to the present invention, each transistor 2, 3 is provided with a second transistor 11, 12 of the same type (in this case, an NPN), having the same characteristics as the associated transistor, and with its base short-circuited to the emitter. In more detail, transistor 11, having the same area as transistor 2, presents its collector and emitter connected respectively to the base and emitter of transistor 2; while transistor 12, having the same area as transistor 3, presents its collector and emitter connected respectively to the base and emitter of transistor 3.

As both transistors 11, 12 present the base short-circuited to the emitter, the base-collector junction is therefore inversely biased. That is, both transistors 11, 12 define diodes inversely biased by the base-emitter voltage drop of associated transistors 2, 3, with the cathode and anode connected respectively to the base and emitter of the associated transistor, and supplied with inverse currents (from the cathode to the anode, i.e. from the collector to the base of transistors 11, 12). Each inverse current of diodes 11, 12 is added to the emitter current of respective transistor 2, 3, thus compensating the second term in (1), so that the difference voltage DV_{BE} continues to vary substantially oppositely to V_{BE3} . That is, bearing in mind the Ebers Moll equation relative to the collector current:

$$I_C = \alpha_F I_{ES} [\exp(V_{BE}/V_T) - 1] - I_{CS} [\exp(V_{BC}/V_T) - 1] \quad (7)$$

and the fact that the first term is nil, due to the short-circuit between the base and emitter; that the base-collector voltage drop of transistors 11, 12 is equal (but opposite in sign) to the base-emitter voltage drop of associated transistor 2, 3; and that saturation currents I_{CS} are equal to those of the associated transistors (since the transistors being compensated and the respective compensating diodes are equal); transistors 11, 12 supply currents:

$$I_{C11} = I_{CS2} [\exp(-V_{BE2}/V_T) - 1]$$

$$I_{C12} = -I_{CS3} [\exp(-V_{BE3}/V_T) - 1]$$

which, less factor α_R and the difference between the base-emitter and base-collector voltage drops of each transistor 2, 3 (which, in the example shown, is nevertheless small), are substantially equal but opposite in sign to the second term in (1) for transistors 2 and 3.

Circuit 1 therefore remains constant even in the presence of extremely high temperatures (in this case, 200-250°C).

The advantages of the structure according to the present invention will be clear from the foregoing description. In particular, by simply providing for an additional transistor having the same characteristics as the one being compensated, it is possible to substantially compensate for a temperature-induced reduction in emitter current, thus ensuring constant operation of the transistor at much higher temperatures as

compared with those currently available.

Moreover, the structure according to the present invention involves no major alterations to the compensated transistor.

To those skilled in the art it will be clear that changes may be made to the structure as described and illustrated herein without, however, departing from the scope of the present invention. In particular, it should be stressed that the structure detailed herein is in no way limited to the band-gap circuit application described above, but may be employed for any application requiring temperature compensation of the inverse saturation current of the transistor.

Moreover, instead of a transistor having a mutually short-circuited base and emitter, the compensating element may consist of a diode parallel connected in inverse configuration, to the base-emitter junction of the compensated transistor, and having the same characteristics (i.e. a junction area equal to the area of the compensated transistor; same doping and starting material), so as to have substantially the same saturation current I_s .

15 Claims

1. A structure for temperature compensating the inverse saturation current of a bipolar transistor (2, 3) having collector, base and emitter regions defining a base-emitter junction; characterised by the fact that it comprises a diode element (11, 12) parallel connected in inverse configuration, to said base-emitter junction of said bipolar transistor (2, 3) and having substantially the same saturation current (I_s).
2. A structure as claimed in Claim 1, for a bipolar NPN transistor, characterised by the fact that said diode element (11, 12) presents an anode region and a cathode region connected respectively to said emitter region and said base region of said bipolar transistor (2, 3).
3. A structure as claimed in Claim 1 or 2, characterised by the fact that said diode element consists of a further bipolar transistor (11, 12) of the same type as said compensated bipolar transistor (2, 3), having the same area, and produced using the same technology; said further transistor having mutually short-circuited emitter and collector regions.
4. A bipolar transistor element having an inverse saturation current requiring compensation, and comprising a compensated transistor (2, 3) having collector, base and emitter regions defining a base-emitter junction; characterised by the fact that it comprises a diode element (11, 12) parallel connected in inverse configuration, to said base-emitter junction, and having substantially the same saturation current (I_s) as said compensated transistor (2, 3).
5. An NPN element as claimed in Claim 4, characterised by the fact that said diode element (11, 12) presents an anode region and a cathode region connected respectively to said emitter region and said base region of said compensated transistor (2, 3).
6. An element as claimed in Claim 4 or 5, characterised by the fact that said diode element consists of a further bipolar transistor (11, 12) of the same type as said compensated transistor, having the same area, and produced using the same technology; said further transistor having mutually short-circuited emitter and collector regions.
7. A "band-gap" voltage reference circuit (1) comprising two bipolar transistors (2, 3) for compensation, each defining a base-emitter junction, and both having mutually connected base terminals defining the output terminal (4) of the circuit; collector terminals connected to a first reference potential line (V_{CC}) via respective current sources (5, 6); and emitter terminals connected together at a common point (8) and to a second reference potential line; a first resistor (7) being series connected to the emitter terminal of a first (2) of said compensated transistors, and a second resistor (9) being connected between said common point (8) and said second reference potential line; characterised by the fact that it comprises two diode elements (11, 12), each parallel connected in inverse configuration, to said base-emitter junction of a respective said compensated transistor (2, 3), and each having substantially the same saturation current (I_s) as said respective compensated transistor.
8. A circuit as claimed in Claim 7, wherein said compensated transistors (2, 3) are NPN types; characterised by the fact that each said diode element (11, 12) presents an anode region and a

cathode region connected respectively to said emitter region and said base region of said respective compensated transistor (2, 3).

9. A circuit as claimed in Claim 7 or 8, characterised by the fact that each said diode element consists of a further bipolar transistor (11, 12) of the same type, having the same area, and produced using the same technology as said respective compensated transistor (2, 3); said further transistors having mutually short-circuited emitter and collector regions.

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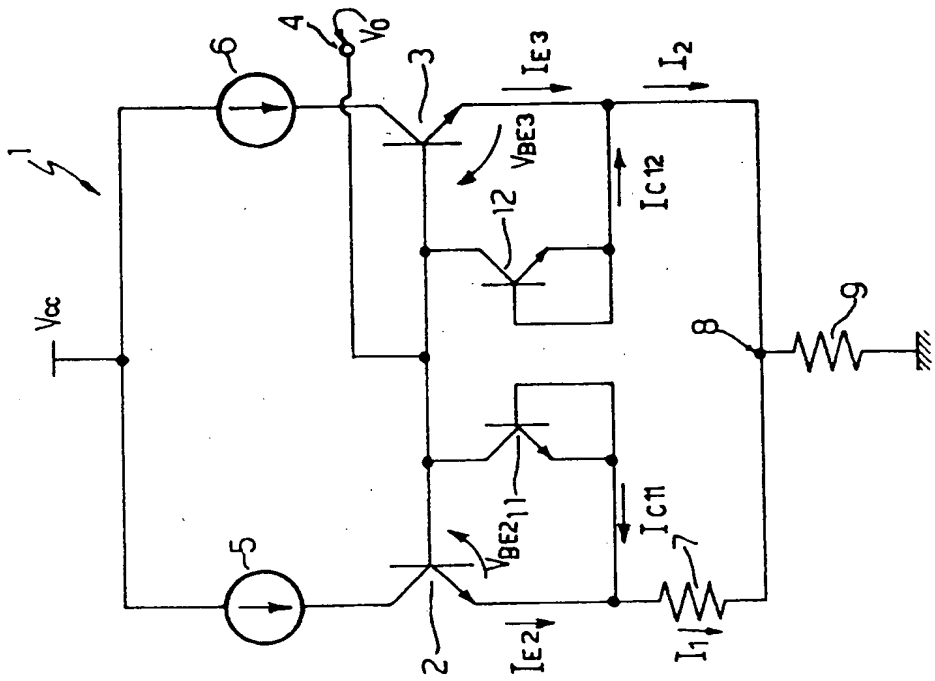


Fig. 2

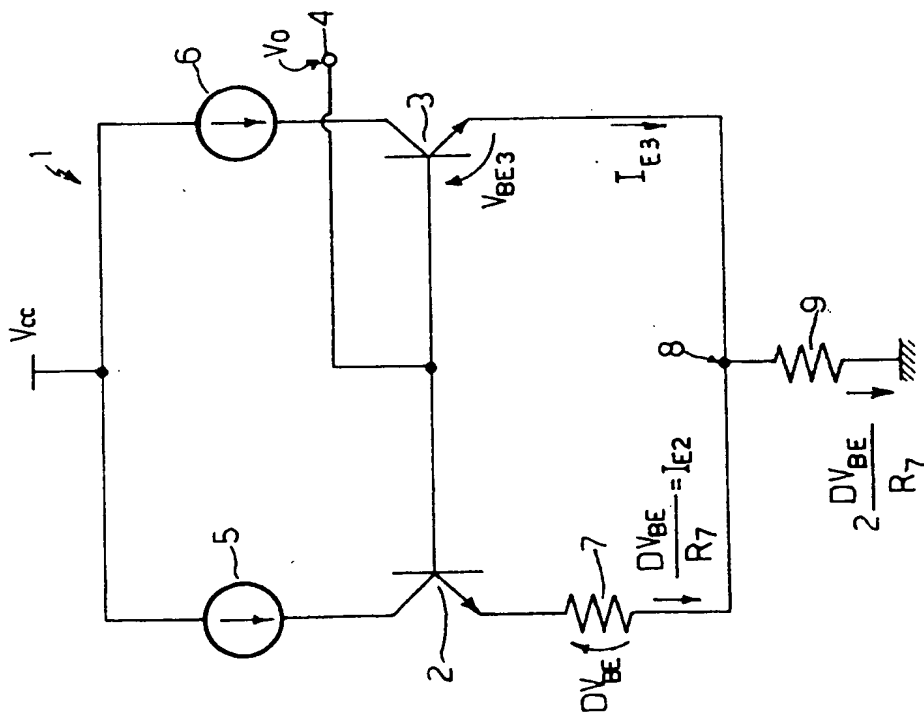


Fig. 1